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ABSTRACT

Unless students have an appropriate attitude toward revision--the keystone of the writing process--teachers who institute writing process approaches face frustration and failure. Implementing the following suggestions may help increase revision in the classroom. First, while the mature writing process is not strictly linear, students developing writing ability need to focus on one aspect at a time in order to avoid cognitive overload and subsequent writer's block and apprehension. As children's writing abilities develop, the perceptive teacher can encourage greater interaction among the process stages. Second, the early steps of the writing process must focus on content and structure rather than on mechanics. Teachers should clearly differentiate between early revision steps and the later step of editing. Third, a great deal of in-class time should be provided for revision, and this includes flexible due dates. Fourth, publication of student works with techniques such as dramatizing students' stories or sponsoring authors' days and writers' conferences will instill pride in their writing and reinforce the benefits of revision. Fifth, conferences between student and teacher best teach students how to use appropriate self-questioning of content and structure during revision. As students internalize initial enforcement, supportive feedback and direct instruction in the types of questions to ask they will become better able to revise their own compositions. (A general editing checklist, self assessment revision questions, and conference question types are included.) (HTH)

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DO WRITERS REALLY REVISE? ENCOURAGING UNNATURAL ACTS IN YOUR CLASSROOM

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DO WRITERS REALLY REVISE? ENCOURAGING UNNATURAL ACTS IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Advocates of the writing process approach to the teaching of writing often speak of a "natural desire" or "primal need" to write. Successful teaching of writing taps into these deeply felt internal motivations, they claim. Whether or not we actually do have such needs, the fact is that few of our students show indications of any primal need to rewrite--to revise their original drafts. "We live in a one-draft-only society," Calkins (1986, p. 23) complains.

The purpose of this article is to suggest ways in which teachers can encourage the revision step of the writing process. In the first part of the article, I will deal with some specific problems involved with revision. Then I will suggest that publication and teacher/peer conferencing are the two key factors in encouraging a proper student attitude toward revision.

Specific Problems in Revision

First, however, some words of warning are necessary. The revision stage is the keystone of the writing process. Without an appropriate student attitude toward revision, the writing process collapses. Advocates of the writing process approach universally ignore the overwhelming difficulties in developing such an attitude, especially in intermediate schools. As a result, teachers who unknowingly institute writing process approaches in their classrooms without accounting for this difficulty face frustration and failure. The majority of

teachers I know who have tried writing process approaches in classes above the second grade have written off the methods as hopelessly unrealistic.

A variety of problems confront teachers who wish to encourage revision. While implementation of the following may not be sufficient for increasing revision in your classes, failure to recognize these problems will lead to very little revision taking place.

Importance of a Linear Model of Process

Theorists in the writing process are placing a great deal of stress on the interactive nature of the five basic steps in the writing process: Rehearsal, drafting, revision, editing, and publishing. That is, in the actual mature process of writing, these events are not strictly sequential. Revision, for example, takes place during rehearsal, as writers contemplate their plan of action and internally revise those contemplations. It also takes place during the drafting stage, as writers cross out and reword even their initial draft. Later in the process, revision frequently is carried out during editing and even in the midst of publication. Purves and Purves (1986) have even suggested changing the term "writing process," because process implies linearity.

While these well-meaning theorists are undoubtedly correct, they have missed the point of the original writing process emphasis on linearity. At early stages of development in

ability to write, students need to focus on one aspect at a time in order to avoid cognitive overload. The writing process simply becomes too complex if all operations are active at the same time, and such problems as writer's block ensue, with all their accompanying frustrations.

As children's writing abilities grow more mature, often during their intermediate grade years, their processes become increasingly internalized and automatized. At that point, the perceptive teacher actively encourages greater interaction among the steps. In fact, this increased flexibility seems to occur naturally (Calkins, 1986).

Differentiation Between Editing and Revision

The early steps of the writing process must focus on content and structure rather than mechanics. Reports from teachers attempting to implement the writing process indicate almost universally that students' revising sessions seldom deal with anything but the mechanics of spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Teachers should clearly differentiate between these early revision steps and the later step of editing. Editing is specifically designed to prepare a "perfect" version of the paper for publication. In order to qualify a writing for publication, spelling, grammar, usage, and punctuation ought to be correct. But these mechanical operations are best handled after finalization of content and form.

A routine suggestion for encouraging editing, though one that is not often carried out by teachers, is to make use of an

editing checklist. The editing checklist contains a list of editing concerns to be carried out by the child and checked off. (See Figure 1 for some possible contents.) Such a checklist should be limited in scope for practical purposes. That is, only those mechanical skills learned by a student should be included on his checklist. In addition, those skills which have been well-learned, to the point of automaticity, need no longer be included.

Much the same sort of checklist can be used during revising, though hopefully the contents would eventually be internalized. Daiute (1986) has found that providing students with such self-prompting questions significantly improved the amount of revising carried out while using a word processor. Her questions dealt with revising issues such as completeness, clarity, organization, and coherence.

Provide Necessary Class Time

Especially for the first few months when instituting a process writing approach in the classroom, teachers must provide a great deal of in-class time. Expecting students to spend time on revision for homework is unrealistic.

In addition, students must not be pressed for quick performance. Due dates should be flexible. Rushing students through the writing process is guaranteed to minimize revision.

Publication as the Key to Motivation for Revision

"Why should I bother to revise?" a student complains. This question catches many teachers flatfooted. They may appeal to future occupations: "You'll get a better job if you can write well." They may appeal to educational accountability: "You have to pass the minimum competency test." They may appeal to grades: "You'll do better in school." All these are important motivations. Some will work well with some students, and others with other students.

Ultimately, however, teachers need to instill a pride in their students' writing if revision is to be reckoned as valuable. Pride in doing a job well is an immediate reinforcer. In addition, it is an internal reinforcer which may result in a lifelong love of writing.

Language, after all, is not simply a cognitive process. Cognitive psychologists and their representatives within the reading field, the schema theorists, have long ignored the social basis of language, preferring to study cognitive processes in isolation from their contexts (Gardner, 1985). A variety of researchers, including Halliday (1974), Vygotsky (1978), and Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) have drawn our attention back to the realization that language is first and foremost a social event. Publication serves as the vehicle to communicate to our students the realization that writing is a social event.

The key to instilling this internal pride as a motivation for revision is publication of student writing. Publication provides students with the incentive for working toward a

finished product. Without publication, there is no true communication involved in the writing process and no reason for pride in one's work.

Younger children and children first being introduced to the writing process ought to be published more frequently. Publication should not become the privilege of the best students. It is important for all children. Yet not all finished products ought to be published. Publication should be an honored event, the culmination of the long process of writing refinement.

Graves (1983) cites several purposes for publishing children's writings. Writing is meant to be a public act. Publication gives a sense of improvement as earlier writings are referenced and compared to new products. The publications help build good public relations with the home. But the key purposes of publication are to convince students that quality matters and that quality is achieved through revision.

Ways to Publish Children's Writing

Graves' (1983) insists on the importance of publishing hardcover books of student writing. Covering and binding can be carried out in a variety of ways to simulate professionally hardbound bookmaking. Some teachers glue cloth covers onto cardboard. Others use wallpaper or contact paper as the covering material. Some bind with needle and thread. Others use staples or metal rings and clamps.

Binding in hardcover is only one way to publish, however.

Other techniques may prove just as effective and may add some variety to the publication process.

1. Author's Chair. The Author's Chair is the special chair in which a student author sits to share his or her writing with an audience. In many classrooms the author's chair is designed for the purpose of providing an opportunity for students to share writings which are in progress. An even more effective use of this special chair is to reserve it for author presentations of finished material to a small group or to the entire class as a means of publication. Inviting visiting authors from other classes can add to the interest.

2. Reading aloud to students. Oral reading of stories to children is a crucial part of any classroom. Teachers can signal the value placed on student writings by interspersing these creations with professionally published trade books.

3. Authors' Day. Some teachers and schools set aside a special day at the end of the year when teachers, parents, and children gather to pay special attention to the year's publications. This might include browsing among book displays, public readings, and dramatic productions of stories created by the children.

4. Monthly Authors' Days. More frequent special days can be arranged to keep the importance of authorship fresh in the students' minds. This is particularly useful with younger children. Any of a wide variety of activities can be included. Children can meet in small sharing groups. Bulletins boards can honor the "Authors of the Month," with accompanying collections of the honored children's writings. Perhaps a few parents or

teachers might be invited to participate.

5. Young Authors' Conference. This is an annual event, similar to the Authors' Day but on a larger scale. It is often sponsored by a local reading teachers' or English teachers' association for area school districts. Local schools send student representatives who are usually the best authors in each grade.

6. Students can construct a regular classroom newspaper or magazine. Computer programs such as The Newsroom create very professional, illustrated printouts which can be photocopied for distribution.

7. Bulletin boards have long served the purpose of classroom publication. Some teachers fill their classrooms with large refrigerator boxes so as to gain more bulletin board space. In order for the writings to actually be read, however, students need time to browse.

8. Electronic publishing has grown in popularity as schools have become equipped with modems for electronic transmission of word processed text files over telephone lines. Lake (1986) has reported on the use of modems to allow schools to send student writings to one another electronically.

9. "Publication" can occur in a variety of nontextual formats. For example, a child's story can be dramatized and performed in class. It may be set to music or illustrated with artwork.

Problems with Publication

In initial enthusiasm with the possibilities of publication for encouraging student writing, teachers often overextend themselves. Complicated binding systems require large amounts of teacher time. While schools can provide an aide to staff a binding center to solve this problem, or teachers can enlist parents, care must be taken not to so burden the teacher with bookbinding or modem operation or drama direction that the writing process gets lost in the process.

Teachers must bear in mind that writing needs to play the central role. If the technology of publication grows to overshadow the writing process, our basic goals become secondary.

Teacher- and Peer-Conferencing

Simultaneously with the provision of motivation for revision must come development of ability to revise. Teachers new to the writing process approach are often surprised that children are unable to provide substantive feedback to their peers on content and structure of writing. This inability should come as no surprise. Evaluation of content and structure is challenging even for trained teachers.

Revision in the writing process is carried out on the basis of questions targeted to the content and structure of the writings. Students must learn how to use appropriate self-questioning during revising. This learning is best carried out through conferencing. As others provide models of examining and

questioning our writings, we in turn learn how to examine and question.

Beginning Writing Process Conferencing

Students will learn the fine points of peer conferencing from their teachers, who act as models of appropriate behaviors during teacher-pupil conferences. However, advocates of the writing process do not adequately stress the importance of strong teacher leadership at preliminary stages of training students to provide feedback to their peers. This failure has led to the failure of many teachers' attempts to institute the writing process in their classrooms.

Initial enforcement of supportive feedback during sharing and initial instruction on insightful evaluation of peer writing must come from the teacher. With much time and patience, a supportive atmosphere and keen analytical abilities will become a more natural part of the children's classroom lives.

Enforcement of supportive feedback. To share one's writing is to lay one's soul open to others, especially if the topic chosen is personally meaningful. The writer makes himself or herself vulnerable. After experience in receiving feedback on one's writing--perhaps after years of such experience--one may become less sensitive, less self-judgmental when the feedback is negative. At the beginning, however, sarcastic or negativistic feedback is disastrous.

A teacher must directly instruct students in appropriately

supportive forms of feedback. Mere modeling of such forms provides too little, too late. The rules should be clearly posted on the bulletin board well before peer conferencing begins:

> Do not laugh unless the writer has told a funny story.
>
> Do not make fun of a story.
>
> Tell three strengths of the story for every one area of need.

Initial teaching of conferencing questions. A teacher must directly instruct students in the types of questions to ask and comments to make during peer conferences. The questions to be asked can be versions of the basic questions writers ought to ask of themselves (see Figure 2, from Calkins, 1983, p. 119) as they rehearse and revise. Such questions can be posted on the bulletin board for easy reference by students. While conferences consisting of simple recitation of preset questions will result at first, the eventual goal is to make conferencing more freeflowing and flexible.

Once the teacher lists and discusses the basic conferencing questions for the class, demonstration evaluations should be carried out until students are aware of the meaning of the questions and of the appropriate supportive atmosphere that is required. By displaying sample stories on a transparency projector, the teacher can model his or her thought processes in simulated writing conferences. After several such modeling sessions, the teacher can begin to invite student questions and comments on new sample stories, providing clear feedback as to the quality of those questions and comments. Only when students

successfully demonstrate appropriate behaviors with sample stories are they ready for conferencing in small groups with actual peer writings.

Development of Revision Abilities

As students internalize the questioning behaviors displayed by teachers and peers, they will become better able to revise their own compositions. This, after all, is the goal of teacher conference questions: To make students better able to independently question themselves.

There is a tremendous variety in types of conferencing questions to ask. Graves (1983), for example, lists six types of questions: Opening, Following, Process, Development, Basic Structures, and Outside of Conference Questions (see Figure 3). Calkins (1986) lists questions for five types of conferences: Content, Design, Process, Evaluation, and Editing. Direct instruction in each subtype would be overkill, however. While teachers should be aware of the various approaches, students can learn to ask such questions of themselves and of others by indirect learning through teacher modeling.

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Figure 1.

GENERAL EDITING CHECKLIST

Have I included my name?

Have I included my title?

Have I included the date?

Spelling

Punctuation

- Periods, question marks, exclamation points
- Quotation marks
- Commas

Sentences

- Run-ons, fragments
- Subject-verb agreement

Paragraphs

Capitals

Excess words

Figure 2.

SELF-ASSESSMENT REVISION QUESTIONS

Calkins, 1986, p. 119

How do I feel about it so far? What is good that I can build on? Is there anything that disturbs me, that doesn't fit or seems wrong?

What am I discovering as I write this? What has surprised me? Where is this leading?

What is the one most important thing I am trying to convey? How can I build this idea? Are there places where I wander away from my central meaning?

How will my audience read this? What will he (she) think as he (she) reads along? What questions will he (she) ask? What will be his (her) response to the different sections of the text...to the whole?

What might I do next? Would it help to try another draft...to talk with someonw...to put it away...to reread it several times...to try a new genre...to keep on writing...or what?

Figure 3.

QUESTION TYPES--DONALD GRAVES (1983)

1. Opening Questions--to open the conference.

How is it going, Tom?

What are you writing about now, Jane?

2. Following Questions--to keep children talking. Perform mirrorlike function to help students see and hear themselves.

Mrs. Bagley: How is it going, Colin?

Colin: Not so hot. I can't get started.

Mrs. Bagley: You can't get started?

3. Process Questions--To help children stay oriented.

Where had you thought to start?

What do you think you'll do next?

If you were to put that new information in here, how would you go about doing it?

What will you do with this piece when it is all done?

4. Questions That Reveal Development--Give teachers a sense as to how the child is developing in his sense of the writing process. These need to be asked early in the year and repeated later in the year for comparison. Any type of process question suits this category.

5. Questions That Deal with Basic Structures--Consider major relationships or fundamental issues within the writing.

Tell me about the dog you are writing about.

So you are thinking about adding some more to this?

6. Questions That Are Solved Outside the Conference--The writer is posed a task to be accomplished after conferencing.

Now I want to see if you can handle this question on your own, Helen: What does your ending have to do with your beginning? What did you want here?

Helen, I notice that you do an enormous amount of lining out and changing on first drafts. Why don't you try an experiment and just write several pages, not permitting yourself to make changes?

PERSONAL EDITING CHECKLIST

E. Balajthy

Use "Find and Replace" to change "which" to "that" when necessary.

Use "Search" function to eliminate "very."

Does my introduction grab reader's attention?

Does my introduction overview the chapter's contents?

Does my conclusion wrap-up my major ideas?

Does my writing become obnoxious or negativistic?

Do I list all my references?

Use Spelling Checker

Reformat and check print formating